DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 554 CE 079 637

AUTHOR	Kerka, Sandra
TITLE	Virtual Learning: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. Trends and Issues Alert No. 12.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0013
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, Ohio State University, 1900 Kenny Rd., Columbus, OH 43210-1090. For full text: http://ericacve.org/fulltext.asp.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Accreditation (Institutions); Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Computer Uses in Education; *Distance Education; Educational Needs; Educational Practices; *Educational Quality; Educational Technology; *Educational Trends; Electronic Mail; Higher Education; *Lifelong Learning; Nontraditional Education; Online Systems; Program Evaluation; Trend Analysis; World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS	*Virtual Universities

ABSTRACT

A new breed of nontraditional institution has arisen to meet the demands of working adults who want to participate in lifelong learning but lack the time for full- or part-time study at a traditional institution. These new institutions range from completely virtual universities, online arms of existing institutions, learning marketplaces, or brokers of other institutions' online courses. Although there are many legitimate virtual institutions, cyber versions of diploma mills are also springing up. Legitimate virtual learning sites are beginning to be accredited through existing agencies such as the North Central Association Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Accrediting agencies and candidate institutions must learn new evaluation methods. For example, traditional evaluation instruments contain questions that are irrelevant in the online environment. Key issues regarding virtual learning include: (1) educational/information technology tends to increase costs; (2) the questions of who will regulate a global learning market and how employers can evaluate credentials must be answered; and (3) virtual universities will help only those who have the necessary equipment and experience to be comfortable with the technologies. (An annotated bibliography constituting approximately 75% of this document contains 22 references.) (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 437 554

Virtual Learning:
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly
Trends and Issues Alert No. 12

Sandra Kerka

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

CE079637

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

by Sandra Kerka

TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERT NO. 12

2000

Virtual Learning: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

A new breed of nontraditional institution has arisen to meet the demands of working adults with multiple responsibilities who hear the inescapable call for lifelong learning, yet cannot fit full- or even part-time study at a traditional institution into their schedules (Joseph 1999; Stamps 1998). These new institutions range from completely virtual universities (such as Jones International University) to online arms of existing institutions (e.g., University of Illinois' degree programs in library and information science and engineering) to learning marketplaces or brokers of other institutions' online courses (e.g., www.hungryminds.com or Western Governors University) (Abernathy 1999; Strong and Harmon 1997).

Although there are many legitimate virtual institutions, cyber versions of diploma mills are also springing up (Geber 1999; Guernsey 1997). These places use the visual glitz of the Web and the willing suspension of disbelief with which many people approach it to sell "degrees" that require no coursework or tuition. Legitimate virtual learning sites are beginning to be accredited by existing agencies such as the North Central Association Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. These agencies and the candidate institutions must learn new evaluation methods; for example, traditional instruments have questions that are irrelevant in the online environment and data are now being collected through web-based questionnaires and e-mail focus groups (Zuniga and Pease 1998). At the same time, some phony virtual universities invoke the names of equally suspicious agencies as sources of their "accreditation" (Geber 1999). Consumer guides to virtual learning may be found in Abernathy (1999), McIlheran (1997), and Phillips and Yager (1998), and principles of good practice for virtual universities are provided by Johnstone and Krauth (1997).

Gladieux and Swail (1999) outline some key issues regarding virtual learning: (1) educational/information technology tends to increase costs; (2) who will regulate a global learning market and how can employers evaluate credentials?; and (3) virtual universities will help only those who have the necessary equipment and experience to be comfortable with the technologies, thus raising new barriers for those traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Although financial aid is not yet widely available for distance learning, some employers offer tuition assistance as a benefit (Phillips and Yager 1997). A new U.S. Department of Education demonstration program is seeking to broaden opportunities for distance learners by expanding eligibility for financial aid and encouraging innovative uses of technology (*Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships* 1999).

Resources

Abernathy, D. J. "www.online.learning." *Training and Development* 53, no. 9 (September 1999): 36-41.

Includes a source guide to online learning and 10 questions to ask about online learning sites.

Bear, M. P. ***Bears' Guide to Earning Degrees Nontraditionally. 13th ed.*** Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1999.

Covers night and weekend colleges, foreign medical schools, degrees by Internet and other electronic avenues, and other ways of earning a bachelor's, master's, doctorate, law, or medical degree through some unconventional method.

Burgess, W. E. ***The Oryx Guide to Distance Learning. A Comprehensive Listing of Correspondence, Electronic, and Media-Assisted Courses. 3rd ed.*** Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 2000.

Information on nearly 700 institutions that offer media-assisted courses and on methods used to deliver each of the 6,000 courses listed, as well as traditional correspondence courses.

Galagan, P. A. "Bullet Train." *Training and Development* 53, no. 7 (July 1999): 22-28.

Among the offerings of Knowledge Universe, a "learning company," is UNext.com, an electronic university offering graduate-level business courses that seeks to become a degree-granting institution.

Geber, B. "Diploma Mills in the Cyberage." *Training* 36, no. 6 (June 1999): 48-53.

Discusses the rise of Internet institutions that sell degrees and other credentials. Offers tips to determine the legitimacy of distance learning opportunities.

Gladieux, L. E., and Swail, W. S. ***The Virtual University & Educational Opportunity. Issues of Equity and Access for the Next Generation. Policy Perspectives.*** Washington, DC: College Board, 1999. (ED 428 637)

Addresses issues concerned with educational programs provided through the virtual university: standards and regulation, cost factors, those who will benefit from distance education developments, new barriers for the traditionally underrepresented in higher education, and the public policy challenge.

Guernsey, L. "Is the Internet Becoming a Bonanza for Diploma Mills?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 44, no. 17 (December 19, 1997): A22-A24. (EJ 558 370)

As the concept of earning a higher education degree at home becomes more accepted, diploma mills operating on the Internet proliferate. Many institutions use the World Wide Web as their primary marketing tool, with sites similar to those of accredited colleges, and do not appear to be breaking state or federal laws.

Hettinger, J. "Degree by E-Mail." *Techniques: Making Education and Career Connections* 72, no. 7 (October 1997): 21-23. (EJ 551 566)

Describes Western Governors University, a virtual university (www.wgu.org) organized by 15 western states and Guam to offer competency-based degrees via the Internet, electronic mail, computer software, video, or satellite.

Johnstone, S. M., and Krauth, B. "Balancing Quality and Access. Some Principles of Good Practice for the Virtual University." In ***Balancing Quality and Access: Reducing State Policy Barriers to Electronically Delivered Higher Education Programs***, edited by Sally M. Johnstone. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1997. (ED 421 993)

Presents guidelines formulated by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, based on research on public policy and educational practice, for electronically offered degree and certificate programs.

Johnstone, S. M., and Tilson, S. "Implications of a Virtual University for Community Colleges." In ***Building a Working Policy for Distance Education. New Directions for Community Colleges*** 25, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 63-72. (ED 412 999)

Describes the development and function of Western Governors University, a virtual university, and its implications for the role of the community college. Recommends that community colleges continue to develop the capacity to provide electronic instruction.

Joseph, G. M. "Reaching and Teaching Women on the Web." ***Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*** 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 45-62.

Women's International Electronic University was created to help women overcome barriers to participation in continuing education, such as work and family demands and unfamiliarity with information technology, by offering credit and noncredit courses through the World Wide Web.

Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships. Project Abstracts-FY1999 Awards. Washington, DC: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, 1999. <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/FIPSE/LAAP/learning.html>

Describes the 29 projects intended to develop model distance learning programs and innovative online learner support services.

LifeLongLearning Online Database of Distance Learning Courses. Petersons, 2000. <http://www.lifelonglearning.com/>

Includes a catalog of online courses, educational self-inventory, and information on earning credit for experience and financing lifelong learning.

McIlheran, S. J. ***Consumer's Guide to Choosing College Courses on the Internet.*** 1997. <http://www.drake.edu/iaicu/consumer_guide.html>

Lists questions to consider in choosing an online institution and course; provides links to accrediting agencies.

Phillips, V., and Yager, C. ***The Best Distance Learning Graduate Schools: Earning Your Degree without Leaving Home.*** New York: Princeton Review Publishing, 1998.

Profiles 195 accredited institutions that offer graduate degrees via distance learning. Includes information on selecting delivery methods, accreditation, and financial aid.

Rucker, T. "Accrediting Virtual Classes Is Key to Remaining Competitive." ***Community College Journal*** 69, no. 1 (August 1998): 36-40. (EJ 570 692)

Discusses the advantages and consequences of accrediting online distance education programs. Lists 12 key issues to consider for online accreditation.

Spille, H. A.; Stewart, D. W.; and Sullivan, E. ***External Degrees in the Information Age. Legitimate Choices.*** Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1997.

Explains how external degree programs operate, including such aspects as assessment of prior learning, contract learning, distance education, and nontraditional degree programs. Considers the problem of diploma mills, their characteristics, their promotional tactics, their policies, external degree program abuses, and accreditation claims.

Stallings, D.. "The Virtual University Is Inevitable: But Will the Model Be Non-Profit or Profit? A Speculative Commentary on the Emerging Education Environment." ***Journal of Academic Librarianship*** 23, no. 4 (July 1997): 271-280. (EJ 550 905)

Discusses changes that are merging traditional, continuing, and distance education into the virtual university. Topics include for-profit or not-for-profit, the compatibility of the profit motive with the concept of quality in education, cooperation between academic and corporate cultures, information and communications technology, and new models of higher education.

Stamps, D. "The For-Profit Future of Higher Education." ***Training*** 35, no. 8 (August 1998): 22-30. (EJ 569 751)

The University of Phoenix (UOP) is a for-profit university that accepts only students who are at least 23 years old and gainfully employed. UOP's brand of no-frills business education is tailored to working adults and represents a new model for postsecondary education.

Strong, R. W., and Harmon, E. G. "Online Graduate Degrees: A Review of Three Internet-Based Master's Degree Offerings." ***American Journal of Distance Education*** 11, no. 3 (1997): 58-70. (EJ 567 751)

Reviews and compares three offerings of graduate degrees via the Internet–two master's programs in management and one master's program in library and information science. Presents a "Consumer's Guide" to online degree programs.

Whittington, C. D., and Sclater, N. "A Virtual University Model." In ***WebNet 98 World Conference of the WWW, Internet and Intranet Proceedings, Orlando, FL, November 7-12, 1998***, edited by Hermann Maurer and Richard G. Olson. Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education, 1998. (ED 427 747)

This paper introduces a model for virtual universities that consists of three layers of issues that virtual universities must consider if they are to prove effective.

Zuniga, R. E., and Pease, P. "Evaluating the Virtual Institution: The Flashlight Project Evaluation of International University." Paper presented at the 38th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Minneapolis, MN, May 17-20, 1998. (ED 422 829)

Examines how the virtual environment affected the evaluation design and process and what the evaluation revealed about IU's ability to reach its learning goals of fostering collaboration, encouraging student-centered learning, and enabling productive interaction between students and faculty and among students.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ***Trends and Issues Alerts*** may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/fulltext.asp>.

Center on Education and Training for Employment

The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210